



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD**  
**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**  
COUNCIL HOUSE  
VICTORIA SQUARE  
BIRMINGHAM  
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000  
Email: [Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk)

Our Ref: IW/1256tr

12 November 2020

**SENT VIA E-MAIL**

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
Secretary of State  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
Westminster  
LONDON SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

**GCSE/A-Level Exams and SATS – 2020/21**

We are writing to express our grave concerns about the ongoing impact of the pandemic on students in exam years and ask for your Department to urgently set out how you will ensure students due to sit SATs, GCSEs and A-Levels next year are not disadvantaged.

A growing number of experts are now reporting that the pandemic has widened the education gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Areas with the highest rates of coronavirus, cities and other major urban areas in the North and Midlands, tend also to include neighbourhoods with higher rates of poverty and lower school results. In Birmingham alone, almost a third of schools had bubbles of pupils self-isolating before the half-term break and this looks likely to continue through the winter and beyond.

Schools' staff in Birmingham are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. Our schools have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic but there is no escaping the fact that this ongoing disruption to education will have most impact on the most disadvantaged.

England's children and young people, and their teachers, urgently need certainty about what arrangements the Department is putting in place to make sure their life chances will not be affected by the pandemic. Students in secondary exam years witnessed the chaos that their older peers experienced last summer and are already worried about what is in store for them.

We look forward to clarification being provided by your Department shortly on this extremely important matter.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Ian Ward**  
**Leader of Birmingham City Council**

**Councillor Jayne Francis**  
**Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture**